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Task force probing attempts to kill Trump urges Secret Service to limit protection of foreigners

By **REBECCA SANTANA**
Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — A task force looking into the assassination attempts against Donald Trump during his presidential campaign is recommending changes to the Secret Service, including protecting fewer foreign leaders during the height of the election season and considering moving the agency out of the Department of Homeland Security.

The 180-page report by the bipartisan congressional task force released Tuesday is one of the most detailed looks so far into the July assassination attempt against Trump during a campaign rally in Pennsylvania and a second one in Florida two months later.

Like other investigations and reports, the task force railed at the agency tasked with protecting the top echelon of America's democratic leaders.

"The events of July 13, 2024, were tragic and preventable, and the litany of related security failures are unacceptable. The Secret Service's zero fail mission allows no margin for error, let alone for the many



Republican presidential candidate former President Donald Trump pumps his fist as he is helped off the stage at a campaign event in Butler, Pa., on Saturday, July 13, 2024.

Associated Press

errors described in this report," the authors wrote.

The task force has been investigating the July shooting, where a gunman opened fire from the roof of a nearby building. Trump was wounded in the ear, one rallygoer was killed and two others were wounded.

It also has been investigating another assassination attempt in September. That gunman

waited for hours for Trump to appear at his golf course in Florida, but a Secret Service agent thwarted the attack by spotting the firearm poking through some bushes.

Here are some of the highlights of the report and its recommendations:

Reducing the number of people protected — specifically foreign leaders

The report's authors noted

that the number of people that the agency is tasked with protecting has "greatly expanded." At the same time, the presidential campaign season is getting longer and more intense, the report said. But the agency is also tasked with protecting foreign dignitaries during the U.N. General Assembly, when heads of state and government flood into New York. That event

happens every September, which comes at the "height of campaign season," the report noted, adding to the agency's staffing crunch.

"Congress, DHS, and the USSS should jointly consider the protective role the USSS plays for foreign leaders and consider whether such duties can be transferred or abrogated in order to focus on the USSS's primary duty: to protect the President and other critical U.S. leaders," the report said. Drop some investigative work, especially during elections. The Secret Service is known for its high-profile work of protecting the president, the vice-president, presidential candidates, their families and others.

But the officers also carry out a wide range of investigations not related to their protective mission — investigating fraud and financial crimes, for example. These responsibilities stem from the time the agency was part of the Treasury Department, and agency leaders say the investigations are an important part of training Secret Service officers for skills they'll need on protective details. □



In this Sept. 5, 2018 file photo, Nicaragua's President Daniel Ortega and his wife, Vice President Rosario Murillo, lead a rally in Managua, Nicaragua.

Associated Press

By **JOSHUA GOODMAN and JOSH BOAK**
Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The

Biden administration is opening an investigation into labor and human rights abuses in Nicaragua, impacting re-

U.S. officials to investigate labor and human rights abuses in Nicaragua

lations with a country the U.S. has a free trade deal with amid growing concerns over President Daniel Ortega's increasingly authoritarian rule. The investigation being opened by the U.S. Trade Representative must be completed within a year.

"Numerous reports suggest the Government of Nicaragua is engaging in repressive acts that harm Nicaragua's own workers and people, undermine fair competition, and destabilize our region,"

U.S. Trade Representative Katherine Tai said in a statement. The investigation, authorized under section 301 of the Trade Act of 1974, will look into not only allegations of abuse but also the extent to which they affect commerce with the U.S. Only after that determination is made will retaliatory actions, if any, be taken.

The U.S. trade representative, in her statement, cited credible reports by several watchdog groups against

Ortega's government, including politically-motivated arrests, forced labor, human trafficking and repression of freedom of association and collective bargaining.

"Such actions exacerbate worker exploitation and diminish economic growth and trade opportunities," the agency said, adding that its decision to open the probe was part of a range of actions taken Tuesday to mark International Human Rights Day. □

Biden issues veto threat on bill expanding federal judiciary as partisan split emerges

By KEVIN FREKING

Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — House Republicans teed up a vote this week on bipartisan legislation to gradually expand by 66 the number of federal judgeships across the country. Democrats, though, are having second thoughts now that President-elect Donald Trump has won a second term.

The White House said Tuesday that if President Joe Biden were presented with the bill, he would veto it. A Congress closely divided along party lines would be unlikely to overturn a veto, likely dooming the bill's chances this year.

It's an abrupt reversal for legislation that the Senate passed unanimously in August. But the GOP-led House waited until after the election to act on the measure, which spreads out the establishment of the new district judgeships over about a decade to give three presidential administrations the chance to appoint the new judges.

Rep. Jerry Nadler, D-N.Y., said the bill was negotiated with the understanding that three unknown, future presidents would have the chance to expand and shape the judiciary. No party would be knowingly given an advantage. He said he begged GOP leadership to take up the measure before the presidential election. But they did not do so. "It was a fair fight and they wanted no part of it," Nadler said.

Rep. Jim Jordan, the Republican chairman of the House Judiciary Committee, explained the timing this way: "We just didn't get to the legislation."

The change of heart about the bill from some Democrats and the new urgency from House Republicans for considering it underscores the contentious politics that surrounded federal judicial vacancies.

Senate roll-call votes are required for almost every judicial nominee these days, and most votes for

the Supreme Court and appellate courts are now decided largely along party lines. Lawmakers are generally hesitant to hand presidents from the opposing party new opportunities to shape the judiciary. Nadler said that the bill would give Trump 25 judicial nominations on top of the 100-plus spots that are expected to open up over the next four years.

"Donald Trump has made clear that he intends to expand the power of the presidency and giving him 25 new judges to appoint gives him one more tool at his disposal to do that," Nadler said.

Nadler said he's willing to take up comparable legislation in the years ahead and give the additional judicial appointments to "unknown presidents yet to come," but until then, he was urging colleagues to vote against the bill.

Still, few are arguing against the merits. Congress last authorized a new district judgeship more than 20 years ago, while the number of cases being filed continues to increase with litigants often waiting years for a resolution.

"I used to be a federal court litigator, and I can tell you it's desperately needed," House Speaker Mike Johnson, R-La., said of the bill.

Sen. Todd Young, R-Ind., first introduced the bill to establish new judgeships in 2020. Last year, the policy-making body for the federal court system, the Judicial Conference of the United States, recommended the creation of several new district and court of appeals judgeships to meet increased workload demands in certain courts.

"Judges work tirelessly every day to meet growing demands and resolve cases as quickly as possible, but with the volume we have and the shortage of judges we have, it just makes it a very difficult proposition," Judge Timothy Corrigan, of the Middle District of Florida,



President Joe Biden speaks about his administrations economic playbook and the future of the American economy at the Brookings Institution in Washington, Tuesday, Dec. 10, 2024.

Associated Press

said in a recent blog post on the website of the Administrative Office of the U.S. Courts. The blog post

states that caseloads are creating delays that will erode public confidence in the judicial process, but

the bill would meet many of the federal judiciary's needs for more judges. Jordan said that as of June 30th, there were nearly 750,000 pending cases in federal district courts nationwide, with each judge handling an average of 554 filings. When asked if House Republicans would have brought the bill up if Vice President Kamala Harris had won the election, Jordan said the bill is "the right thing to do" and that almost half of the first batch of judges will come from states where both senators are Democrats, giving them a chance to provide input on those nominations before Trump makes them. □



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Suspect in the killing of UnitedHealthcare's CEO struggles, shouts while entering courthouse

By **MICHAEL R. SISAK and MARK SCOLFORO**
Associated Press

ALTOONA, Pa. (AP) — The suspect in the killing of UnitedHealthcare's CEO struggled with deputies and shouted Tuesday while arriving for a court appearance in Pennsylvania, a day after he was arrested at a McDonald's and charged with murder.

Luigi Nicholas Mangione emerged from a patrol car, spun toward reporters and shouted something partly unintelligible referring to an "insult to the intelligence of the American people" while deputies pushed him inside.

Prosecutors were beginning to take steps to bring Mangione back to New York to face a murder charge while new details emerged about his life and how he was captured. The 26-year-old Ivy League graduate from a prominent Maryland real estate family was charged with murder hours after he was arrested in the Manhattan killing of Brian Thompson, who led the United States' largest medical insurance company.

At the brief hearing, defense lawyer Thomas Dickey informed the court that Mangione will not waive extradition to New York but instead wants a hearing on the issue. Mangione was denied bail after prosecutors raised concerns about public safety and a potential flight risk.

Mangione, wearing an orange prison jumpsuit, mostly stared straight ahead at the hearing, occasionally consulting papers, rocking in his chair or looking back at the gallery. At one point, he began to speak to respond to the court discussion but was quieted by his lawyer.

Mangione likely was motivated by his anger with what he called "parasitic" health insurance companies and a disdain for corporate greed, a law enforcement bulletin obtained by The Associated Press said.



Suspect Luigi Mangione is taken into the Blair County Courthouse on Tuesday, Dec. 10, 2024, in Hollidaysburg, Pa.

He wrote that the U.S. has the most expensive health care system in the world and that profits of major corporations continue to rise while "our life expectancy" does not, according to the bulletin, based on a review of his handwritten notes and social media posts.

Mangione called "Unabomber" Ted Kaczynski a "political revolutionary" and may have found inspiration from the man who carried out a series of bombings while railing against modern society and technology, according to police bulletin.

Mangione remained jailed in Pennsylvania, where he was initially charged with possession of an unlicensed firearm, forgery and providing false identification to police. Manhattan prosecutors have obtained an arrest warrant, a step that could help expedite his extradition from Pennsylvania.

Mangione was arrested in Altoona, Pennsylvania about 230 miles (about 370 kilometers) west of New York City after a McDonald's customer recognized him and notified an employee, authorities said.

Officers found him sitting at a back table, wearing a blue medical mask and

looking at a laptop, according to a Pennsylvania police criminal complaint. He initially gave them a fake ID, but when an officer asked Mangione whether he'd been to New York recently, he "became quiet and started to shake," the complaint says.

When he pulled his mask down at officers' request, "we knew that was our guy," rookie Officer Tyler Frye said.

Images of Mangione released Tuesday by Pennsylvania State Police showed him pulling down his mask in the corner of the McDonald's while holding what appeared to be hash browns and wearing a winter jacket and beanie. In another photo from a holding cell, he stood unsmiling with rumpled hair.

New York Police Commissioner Jessica Tisch said Mangione was carrying a gun like the one used to kill Thompson and the same fake ID the shooter had used to check into a New York hostel, along with a passport and other fraudulent IDs.

NYPD Chief of Detectives Joseph Kenny said Mangione also had a three-page, handwritten document that shows "some ill will toward corporate America."

A law enforcement official who wasn't authorized to discuss the investigation publicly and spoke with The Associated Press on condition of anonymity said the document included a line in which Mangione claimed to have acted alone.

"To the Feds, I'll keep this short, because I do respect what you do for our country. To save you a lengthy investigation, I state plainly that I wasn't working with anyone," the document said, according to the official.

It also had a line that said, "I do apologize for any strife or traumas but it had to be done. Frankly, these parasites simply had it coming." Pennsylvania prosecutor Peter Weeks said in court that Mangione was found with a passport and \$10,000 in cash, \$2,000 of it in foreign currency. Mangione disputed the amount.

Thompson, 50, was killed Wednesday as he walked alone to a Manhattan hotel for an investor conference. Police quickly came to see the shooting as a targeted attack by a gunman who appeared to wait for Thompson, came up behind him and fired a 9 mm pistol.

Investigators have said "delay," "deny" and "depose"

were written on ammunition found near Thompson's body. The words mimic "delay, deny, defend," a phrase used to criticize the insurance industry.

From surveillance video, New York investigators determined the shooter quickly fled the city, likely by bus. A grandson of a wealthy, self-made real estate developer and philanthropist, Mangione is a cousin of a current Maryland state legislator.

Valedictorian at his elite Baltimore prep school, he went on to earn undergraduate and graduate degrees in computer science in 2020 from the University of Pennsylvania, a spokesperson said.

"Our family is shocked and devastated by Luigi's arrest," Mangione's family said in a statement posted on social media late Monday by his cousin, Maryland Del. Nino Mangione. "We offer our prayers to the family of Brian Thompson and we ask people to pray for all involved."

From January to June 2022, Luigi Mangione lived at Surfbreak, a "co-living" space at the edge of touristy Waikiki in Honolulu.

Like other residents of the shared penthouse catering to remote workers, Mangione underwent a background check, said Josiah Ryan, a spokesperson for owner and founder R.J. Martin.

"Luigi was just widely considered to be a great guy. There were no complaints," Ryan said. "There was no sign that might point to these alleged crimes they're saying he committed."

At Surfbreak, Martin learned Mangione had severe back pain from childhood that interfered with many aspects of his life, from surfing to romance, Ryan said. Mangione left Surfbreak to get surgery on the mainland, Ryan said, then later returned to Honolulu and rented an apartment.

Martin stopped hearing from Mangione six months to a year ago. □

Syrians in Germany worried by some politicians' eagerness for them to go home after Assad's fall

By KIRSTEN GRIESHABER
and GEIR MOULSON
Associated Press

BERLIN (AP) — Nearly a decade after he arrived in Germany from Syria and took a selfie with then-Chancellor Angela Merkel, Anas Modamani has finished his university studies and has a German passport.

He's less positive about some German politicians' reactions to the fall of Bashar Assad, which was followed within hours by the first talk of Syrians returning. "Berlin has become my second home, I will definitely stay here," Modamani said Tuesday. "I managed it" a reference to Merkel's famous slogan "We will manage it," coined as Germany faced the challenge of integrating hundreds of thousands of migrants.

As Syrians took to the streets of Berlin Sunday, far-right leader Alice Weidel wrote on social platform X that anyone celebrating a "free Syria" in Germany "evidently no longer has a reason to flee. He should return to Syria immediately." With a German election approaching and the government under longstand-



Anas Modamani, 27 a Syrian refugee in Germany, shows his famous selfie with German Chancellor Angela Merkel he took after his arrival in the country, in a Syrian restaurant in Berlin, Tuesday, Dec. 10, 2024.

ing pressure to reduce irregular migration, some mainstream opposition politicians also appeared eager to kickstart the return of Syrians.

On Monday, prominent conservative lawmaker Jens Spahn suggested on n-tv television the government could say that "for everyone who wants to go back to Syria, we will char-

ter planes for them, they will get a starting fund of 1,000 euros (\$1,055)." He stressed, though, that it will take time before it's clear whether things have stabilized.

Such ideas strike Syrians as indecently hasty. Modamani, a 27-year-old from Damascus who came to Germany in 2015, said he was "shocked" by reports of the 1,000-euro proposal.

"I think that's a terrible idea," he said as he sat over lunch with Syrian friends at a Berlin restaurant. "The situation in Syria is still just as dangerous as before."

Modamani, who says he shares an apartment with his girlfriend from Ukraine and finished his studies in business communication, illustrates what German officials acknowledge is

the successful integration of many Syrians. A deputy interior minister, Juliane Seifert, said Syrians are "a group that has significantly above-average educational qualifications," among them many doctors.

The number of Syrians gaining German citizenship has risen from 6,700 in 2020 to 75,500 last year, when they were the biggest single group and accounted for 38% of all naturalizations. Bavarian Interior Minister Joachim Herrmann, whose conservative party has talked tough on migration, said Tuesday that many Syrian refugees are now "superbly integrated in our country, have a job and are urgently needed here" and no one is thinking of getting such people to leave Germany.

"Those who have already integrated well are still cordially welcome," Herrmann told Deutschlandfunk radio Tuesday. "But it is clear that there are also people who have been here for 10 years and don't have a job and haven't integrated well, and then it's right to help them return to their homeland" if Syria stabilizes. □

Associated Press

People jumping in front of cars to get injury payouts sparks a grim holiday warning in South Africa

CAPE TOWN, South Africa (AP) — A trend in South Africa of people jumping in front of slow-moving cars to get compensation payouts for injuries drew a warning Tuesday from the government's national Road Accident Fund.

In a statement, it said the phenomenon of people intentionally getting hit near intersections and stop streets was becoming a significant problem, while it acknowledged that some cases might have been driven by poverty and desperation at an expensive time of the year.

"We acknowledge road users may be faced with socioeconomic challenges,"

the fund said.

The RAF allows people to claim compensation from a national fund if they are injured in car crashes.

But it warned that it was clamping down on bogus claims after identifying the new trend. It said people were waiting for vehicles to "slow down enough that they don't get killed" before throwing themselves in front of or against the cars to fake an accident.

"The RAF does not compensate someone who intentionally causes a motor vehicle accident, even if this results in serious injuries," it said.

The fund didn't say how many cases of people in-

tentionally getting hit by cars it had recorded but said it had rejected nearly 50,000 claims in the period between February 2022 and February this year, some of them because they were fraudulent.

The warning comes ahead of South Africa's notoriously dangerous holiday season on the roads. The RAF said that on average more than 1,500 people are killed in road accidents in South Africa during the holiday period between the start of December and Jan. 11. Around 40% of those fatalities are pedestrians, it said.

"Road users are urged to also remember that the fund does not compensate

for the death itself but only pays for the actual costs to cremate the deceased or bury them in a grave," the fund said in a grim holiday

message.

The RAF said it paid out \$2.5 billion in claims in the 2023-2024 financial year. □



Few cars and residents are seen in the normally busy streets of Yeoville, downtown Johannesburg, South Africa, April 10, 2020.

Associated Press

Dengue cases set a new record in the Americas this year as deaths also surge

By **DÁNICA COTO**

Associated Press

SAN JUAN, Puerto Rico (AP)

— Dengue fever is sweeping across the Caribbean and the Americas, with a record 12.6 million suspected cases of the mosquito-transmitted virus reported this year, nearly triple the number from last year, health officials said Tuesday.

Cases of dengue have been surging globally as warmer weather brought on by climate change enables mosquitoes to expand their reach.

The Pan American Health Organization the regional office of the World Health Organization in the Americas said deaths from dengue are also rising.

More than 7,700 deaths have been reported in the Caribbean and the Americas so far in 2024, a more than 200% increase, compared to 2,467 deaths in 2023, according to the organization.

The number of cases in the region, which includes the



Jenny Chiroque sits on a bed with netting at La Merced Hospital where she is treated for dengue in Paita, Peru, Feb. 29, 2024.

Associated Press

United States, is the highest reported since record keeping began in 1980, PAHO director Jarbas Barbosa said at a news conference.

"This is linked directly to climatic events," he said, referencing warmer tem-

peratures, droughts and flooding. A fast population growth, unplanned urbanization and poor sanitation have contributed to the rise in dengue.

The virus has surged worldwide since last year and

spread to areas previously free of dengue, according to PAHO. Brazil is reporting the highest number of dengue cases with more than 10 million, followed by Argentina, with more than 580,000, and Mexico with more than

half a million. In the Caribbean, Guyana is leading with more than 41,000 cases, followed by French Guiana, the Dominican Republic and Martinique. Meanwhile, local dengue transmission has been reported in California, Florida and Texas this year, according to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

There are four types of dengue virus, simply known as 1, 2, 3 and 4. Having one type of virus doesn't provide immunity from others.

For the first time in a decade, dengue serotype 3 has predominated in Mexico, Central America and parts of the Caribbean in the second half of the year, according to Thais dos Santos, PAHO's advisor on arboviral diseases. Many infected people don't get sick, but some experience headache, fever and flu-like symptoms. Severe cases can cause serious bleeding, shock and death. Repeated infections can be especially dangerous. □

Venezuela's opposition signals flexible timeline toward long-sought government transition

MADRID (AP)

— Venezuela's political opposition on Tuesday signaled a shift toward a flexible timeline for a government transition that it had long insisted would come next month when the new presidential term is set to begin.

The change came as the faction's candidate in the July presidential election, Edmundo González, remained in exile in Spain and its leader Maria Corina Machado continued to hide in Venezuela, both efforts meant to avoid arrest, with only 30 days left before Venezuela's constitutionally mandated swearing-in ceremony.

The move underscores the challenges the opposition coalition faces to deliver on its promise to remove President Nicolás Maduro from office, even as dozens of nations back the faction's claim to victory and



Venezuelan opposition leader Edmundo González speaks during a press conference in downtown Madrid, Spain, Tuesday, Dec. 10, 2024.

Associated Press

denounce the government for electoral fraud.

"On January 10, the one who is against the wall is really Maduro, not us," Machado said via livestream during an event in Madrid, that highlighted the repression ruling party opponents have faced since the July

28 election. "When will that understanding really be reached and trigger the transition? It could be before, it could be on January 10, it could be after."

Machado did not give details of the "terms of a negotiation" which she said the opposition has offered

the government. But the faction has repeatedly said that a top priority is the release from prison of hundreds of people detained for being actual or perceived government opponents.

Venezuela's National Electoral Council, which is stacked with Maduro loyalists, declared him the election winner hours after polls closed. But unlike previous presidential elections, electoral authorities did not provide detailed vote counts. Meanwhile, the main opposition coalition collected tally sheets from 80% of the nation's electronic voting machines, posted them online and said the voting records showed González won the election with twice as many votes as Maduro. The government ignored calls for transparency from inside and outside Venezuela, and instead, the ruling

party-controlled National Assembly sent Maduro an invitation for his swearing-in ceremony. González left Venezuela in September for exile in Spain after a warrant was issued for his arrest in connection with an investigation into the publishing of the vote tally sheets, while Machado has been hiding for months at an undisclosed location, which she says is in Venezuela. González again told reporters Tuesday that he is willing to return to Venezuela to take office. "I see myself assuming the position for which I was voted by the majority of Venezuelans on July 28," he said without offering a timeframe. Dozens of governments, including the United States, have recognized González as the election winner, but it is unclear whether Maduro and allies would allow him to enter Venezuela. □



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Blackstone Beach

(Oranjestad)—Named after its most recognizable feature, the Blackstone Beach almost represents the opposite of the typical Aruban beaches. For one, it has black sand and is covered in black smooth stones. Secondly, it lies on

the northern side of the island, away from the white sandy beaches of in the southern region. So, if you feel up for something different—or if it's opposite day, visit the Blackstone Beach.

Blackstone Beach shows the more natural side of Aruba: the stones that cover the beaches and the shape of it has been crafted for thousand years via volcanic eruptions, coral reef movements and wave activity of the rural northern part of the island.

Located further east to the Natural Bridge and Andicuri Beach, the Blackstone Beach is relatively easy to access. Once you get passed the Ayo Rock Formation, take the Andicuri road leading up to Andicuri Beach. There, you can park



your car and take a 1km hike towards Blackstone Beach.

This beach forms part of the Arikok National Park and is therefore a site that is preserved. This is why it is also relatively untouched by commercial influences. Despite being called a beach, do note that it

is not advised to swim in the water, as the current is very strong and can easily stray you further in the wild ocean. However, you can still enjoy a spectacular view of the stones and the northern ocean that stretches out in front of the beach and take a picture with your friends or family!□



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Best spots to view the sunset

(Oranjestad)—Today we celebrate Valentine's Day, and what can be more romantic than surprising your partner with a date watching the sunset. Aruba's sunset leave many speechless, and luckily, the best spots to view the sunset are entirely accessible and easy to find. Here are some of the best places to view the sunset on the island.

California Light House

Of course, being one of the highest point easily accessible to locals and tourists, the California Light House hill not only offers a tremendous view of the sunset, but also a breath taking scenery of most of the island. In the distance you can spot all the hotels, the western shoreline and the wild waves that crash on the northern side of the island.



Manchebo & Eagle Beach

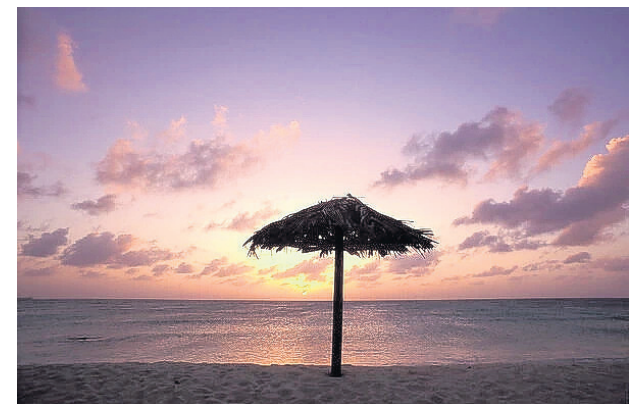
Speaking of the western shoreline, the best spots for viewing the sunset on the beach has to be either Manchebo Beach or at Eagle Beach, which stretch along the entire western coast of the island starting from behind Bucuti & Tara Beach Resort up to the Amsterdam Manor roundabout. The sunset on these beaches is truly breathtaking; the sky and ocean look so big and spacious, and paired with the orange/pink hue of the sunset, the white sandy beaches and the soft sounds of waves crashing—it can only be described as an experience!*

Arashi Beach

Another beach that has to be considered as another great spot to view the sunset. Arashi Beach is the last beach you will find along the western coast line, just before you drive up the hill to the California Light House. A favorite for surfers and body boarders, the Arashi sky stretches out for miles, lending a spectacular canvas for the sun to create a masterpiece of orange, pink and purple hue.

Hooiberg Hill

These last two options are for more active cou-



ples. If you and your partner like to hike, the Hooiberg Hill may be a great place for you to get your daily workout in and enjoy a beautiful view of the sunset and the island as a little reward. Climb on top the 587-step stairs and reach the top to enjoy this incredible scenery.

Casibari Rock Formation

If you're a rock climber, you might enjoy watching the sunset on top of the Casibari Rock Formation. It's no Yosemite, but it does offer a fun little exercise to get to the top. But if you prefer not to get your hands a little dirty, you can always use the stairs in the back.

Editor's note: This spot may be my personal favorite, if you couldn't already tell...☐

Dining in? Try making a local favorite How to make "funchi hasa"

(Oranjestad)—A night in can be just as fun as a night out on the town, especially if you got the right snacks to munch on. One of the most famous Aruban snacks or appetizers is "funchi hasa" (fried polenta sticks). A super easy meal that adults and children will both enjoy. Here's how to make it!

Before we start, get to know the basics

So what is funchi hasa? Funchi, or Aruban polenta, is a popular side dish for local dishes, like soups, stews and fried fish. Made from a corn flour, water and butter mixture, this appetizer is traditionally eaten alongside a warm meal. However, locals also like to fry sticks of funchi

for a quick and filling snack.

Ingredients (measured by heart)

1. Polenta flour*
2. Water
3. Butter
4. Salt to taste

Directions

Bring water to a boil in a medium-sized sauce pan. Add in some salt and butter to taste in the boiling water and let this dissolve and melt. Then, gradually add the flour while stirring with a wooden spoon. The mixture will start to begin to harden pretty fast, so be careful not to add too much. At this phase of cooking, you want a goopy thick mixture, but thin enough so

you can continue to stir to get all the lumps out.

After reaching a semi-firm, yet flexible texture, grab a baking pan or any large, deep plate, and pour the mixture in. Be sure that this plate is wet or greased so that the mixture does not stick to the bottom. Let this cool completely while it firms up for the last time. Once it's cooled you can enjoy it as is, topped with some butter or shredded cheese. Or, you can take it to another level of deliciousness.

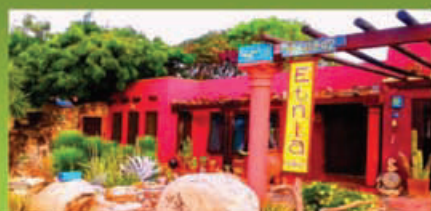
When your funchi is firm enough, cut it into strips (size is up to you). Heat up some oil in a pan and fry those babies up! After frying, you



can top it with some cheese or enjoy it with your favorite dipping sauce.

Note: We recommend the FUNCHI FRESKU polenta flour brand that is sold in all supermarkets on the island. You can also use yellow corn flour from the brand PAN.☐

Photo credit of fried funchi sticks:
Jacqueline Felida on Pinterest.



Article by Etnia Nativa

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Etnia Nativa is close to high rise Hotels



First Aruba Public Teachers

Every week, Etnia Nativa writes a new episode concerning culture and heritage, focusing on various aspects of native knowledge, transcendental wisdom, and the importance of upholding cultural identity. Its goal is to educate readers and encourage them to embrace a genuine island state of consciousness. Today it shares information regarding Aruba's first public teachers.

Aruba has come a long way to achieving its Catholic education, which began to be established in 1857 when nuns from Roosendaal, the Netherlands settled in Playa, later also in Santa Cruz, then Noord, and finally in Savaneta, the four parishes of the island.

In 1822, the government started a public school in Playa, which was run by Klaas van Eekhout, a Protestant teacher. However, at the same time, the Spanish priest Serafin de Sevilla began teaching Catholic education in Playa. Years later, another Catholic father of the Capuchin order, Paulus Willems, would do the same in Noord. The Spanish language was more useful to the inhabitants of the island, who did not have much contact with the Dutch.

However, the Dutch occupation had tried to forbid visits of priests from the continent. It deprived the native population of the Roman Catholic religion. Besides all effort, a combination of Spanish and Dutch influences marks the history of education in Aruba. We must mention that due to the persistence of Catholic priests who maintained steady contact with the local population despite official prohibitions the majority of the native and mestizo population is still Ro-



Pastor Thomas van Sadelhoof O.P. around 1900 in Noord
E.N. Library

man Catholic.* (Episode 212: Building Aruban Education)*

The first Catholic or native teacher in Aruba was Antoin Henriquez, who lived in Tanki Flip. He was named "Lieutenant van de Boschwachters" or chief of the warriors and it is said that, like many other native braves, he was a good man and a great "cunuquero" or farmer. He was appointed school teacher in 1857 by the Dutch commander of Oranjestad. He was respected and feared by his students because he used a "rod" to discipline and hit the palms of disobedient children's hands.

At that time, a man known as Anton de Vries arrived from his native Gelderland in Holland to also work as a school teacher. He went from house to house giving private lessons. He had further managed to gather a group of almost 70 students; however, bad luck had struck for parishioners and he died very young of "black fever". For this reason, the school in Playa was closed until the arrival of two dedicated nuns from Roosendaal; the Netherlands reached our island to continue the teaching work, Modeste and Casimire. Now, since the arrival of these nuns, the public school in Playa has not closed again.

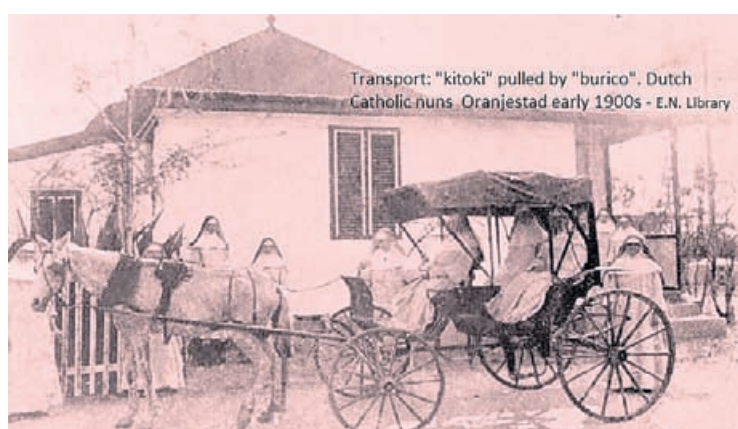
In 1862, the precarious school with cornstalk thatched roofs in Playa was intentionally burned down, which led to the construction of a new, larger school with a tiled roof.

Episode CCLXXXIII - 283

At the same time, the nuns Paschalia and Clara, who had settled in the district of Santa Cruz, already recognized as a parish, began to impart Catholic education, which always continued along the right moral path. Oral tradition tells us that, at that time, the houses of the parishioners were widely dispersed, but the nuns also gave private classes in a house located near Cero Cristal so that some children in the area could also access education.

Savaneta depended on the parish of Santa Cruz, but since it was a long distance away and had approximately 50 children who needed a teacher, Piet Croes, Herry Croes, Bernardo Maduro and Gillis Maduro were there, who, exchanging with each other and took charge of education both in Savaneta and in Noord. This always took place while considering the visits of the nuns who, in one way or another, came frequently to both districts. □

If you enjoyed reading our stories and are interested in learning more regarding the true Aruban identity, we recommend you to book a visit to Etnia Nativa—the only "living museum of its kind in the Caribbean"—a fascinating choice, a trend setter since 1994 and co-founders of Islands National Park, Archaeological Museum Aruba and Artisan Foundation among others. Etnia Nativa shares valuable knowledge and connects you to the ancient island's spirit and soul. WhatsApp +297 592 2702etnianaativa03@gmail.com



Transport: "kitoki" pulled by "burico". Dutch Catholic nuns Oranjestad early 1900s - E.N. Library



Spanish priest Serafin's house, and First School in Aruba
E.N. Library

In celebration of 200 years of the Aruban gold rush: Get to know the history of the gold industry on Aruba



(Oranjestad)—This year we celebrate a few milestone anniversaries on Aruba, one of them being the 200th anniversary of when gold was first discovered on the island. We have talked about the Bushiribana Gold Mill Ruin before and its brief history during the gold industry on Aruba, but get to know a little more about the history of the “Aruban Gold Rush.”

The first hint of gold on Aruba actually dates back to 1725, when rumors about gold being found in dug up treasure chests of the Spanish colonial era prompted the first official exploration for gold on the island, commissioned by the Dutch West India Company. Under the leadership of Mr. Paulus Printz, a three-year search was conducted on Aruba, to no avail. Though they found some specks of gold, it was not enough to motivate a further search, and the assignment was discontinued by Printz himself. It wasn't until 100 years later, in 1824, when a young farmer boy named Willem Rasmijn found a lump of gold while out herding his father's sheep in the area of Rooi Fluit on the north coast. His father took it to a local merchant who then sold the lump for \$70. Unbeknownst to the boy and his father, they quite literally struck gold, and as word got out, a gold fever spread among the locals who started searching for more gold.

When the colonial governor in Curacao, Governor Cantz'laar, heard about the news, he sent his adjutant, Capitan van Raders, to start harvesting gold. This was in July 1824. In August of that same year, the governor followed suit to the island, accompanied by high-ranking military officials. When citizens started swarming the area in search for gold, The Netherlands sent more troops to safe guard the gold.

Prominent places where gold was found was in Daimari, Wacobana, Arikok, Rooi Fluit, Hadicouradi and later West punt, where gold ore was found. Because of a lack in advanced technology and materials to harvest the gold, the process took a more primitive approach: Clay rocks containing traces of gold were left to dry in the sun. Then, workers would start chipping the clay away on a large canvas to catch the gold particles that were left behind after the wind blew away the dust from the clay.

In the harvest period of 1824-1825, there was a total of 71,000 kilos collected through commissioned harvesting. Locals themselves reportedly found about 25 pounds worth of gold in the nearby rivers. The following years after that first big harvest, commission work fell off, and in 1828, the director of the goldmines, Johan Gravenhorst, decided to halt harvesting.

Almost 40 years later, the London-based Aruba Island Gold Mining Company Ltd. was granted concession. The firm built their gold mines on Bushiribana, and in the port of Oranjestad a long road that connected the gold mill to the port. The ores themselves came from Sero Plat en Sero Cristal.

By this point, workers were still using primitive methods to harvest the ores. For example, when someone had to go into the mines, there were no stairs or lifts; the person had to be brought down in a big bucket, with two or more workers holding the bucket by a thick rope above ground. Aruba Island Gold Mining Company Ltd. reportedly operated until 1899, and right after the Aruba Gold Concession Ltd. was established, coincidentally also based in London. This time, the gold mill in Balashi was built, and more mines were dug up all around the island. The gold ores that were found were transported via track engine, locally called the “trekinchi”. Despite being more equipped for the job, the Aruba Gold Concession Ltd. could not produce any real profit, and so the concession was terminated just eight years later, in 1908.

A local firm, the “Aruba Goud Maatschappij” (Aruba Gold Company) took over the concession, along with all the materials and equipment. In the beginning, the company saw good profit, and for a while, the island's economy depended primarily on the mining and harvesting of gold. But just like its predecessors, the streak of luck for the Aruba Gold Company came to an end when WWI broke out.

The main reason why production stopped this time was reportedly because of a lack in dynamite for extracting the ores from the mines, as well as a lack in raw materials like German cyanide for the refining process. By the time the war ended, the equipment that was left at Balashi were too old to use again. After the war, gold production on the Aruba was left to a standstill.

According to an issue in Aruba Esso News paper in 1953, Henny Eman wanted to start up digging again, this time using independent miners. He argued that there was proof of more gold to be discovered. Plus, hiring independent miners would boost the island's employment rate.

When it was proven that gold was in fact still present, the executive board on the island promised to fund the project only if the gold dug up proved to be valuable. However, nothing else was reported after this, so it could be concluded that there was no real profitable market on the island anymore.

The ruins of the Bushiribana and Balashi Gold Mills are still standing, and open for the public to visit. These structures offer a glance into the past, to a time where Aruba experienced one of its first wave of industrialization. Today, these structures are persevered as historical monuments. □

Source:

1. “De Kolibrie op de Rots (en meer over the geschiedenis van Aruba)” by Evert Bongers.
2. Aruba Esso News, 1953 issue.

CROSSWORD

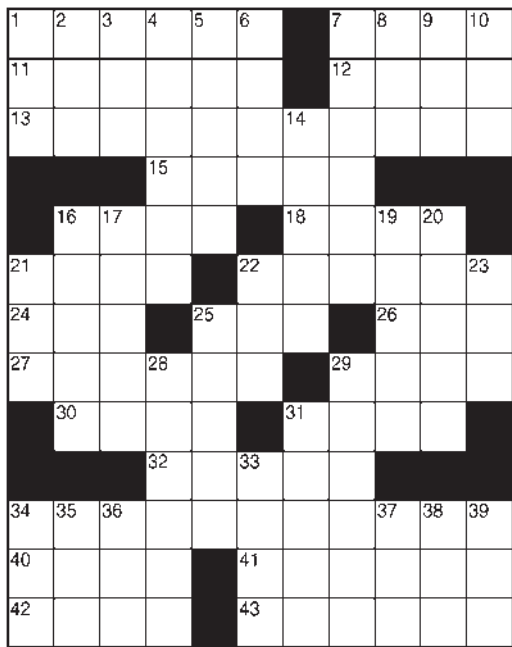
By THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS

- 1 Craig of "Skyfall"
7 Speedy
11 Marigold color
12 Ready for business
13 Warning with no follow-through
15 English racing town
16 Shopping aid
18 A+, for one
21 Ethanol source
22 Eye part
24 Mine matter
25 Sedan or SUV
26 Like Pride Parade participants
27 Willful
29 Chess turn
30 Placed down
31 Fast runner
32 Toil away
34 Like some gas stations
40 "Got it"
41 Book worker
42 Tavern order

DOWN

- 43 Burglar alarm part
1 Buck's mate
2 Ulna's place
3 Catch some z's
4 Hospital worker
5 Sphinx setting
6 "Why don't we!"
7 Layout
8 King Kong, for one
9 Marlin's home
10 Booming stuff
14 "Iliad" author
16 Reef material
17 Game setting
19 Strictness
20 Rascal
21 Farm grazer
22 Operated
23 Pro vote
25 Musical closes
28 Boat part
29 Singer
31 Large mob
33 Honey bunch
34 Tell tales
35 Purpose
36 Director Spike
37 "— not for me to say"
38 Pigeon sound
39 Make missteps



12-12

AXYDLBAAXR
is LONGFELLOW

One letter stands for another. In this sample, A is used for the three L's, X for the two O's, etc. Single letters, apostrophes, the length and formation of the words are all hints. Each day the code letters are different.

12-12

CRYPTOQUOTE

K'G QC Q LRQUY KE GF

RKMY VJYE YOOQEH I QOY

ICQCKET CX UXBEC QI

TXKET XBC. — QEXEFGXBI

Cryptoquote: SNOWFALL ROUSES
YOUR INNER CHILD TO DREAM AND PLAY ONCE
MORE — ANGIE WEIL AND CROSBY

Cruise ship Schedule: December 09 - 15 2024

			ARR	DEPT	BERTH	
MON	09	CELEBRITY ECLIPSE	08.00	21.00	C	1
TUE	10	CELEBRITY REFLECTION	08.00	21.00	B	1
		CARNIVAL HORIZON	08.00	22.00	C	1
		EMERALD PRINCESS	09.00	22.00	I	1
WED	11	ZUIDERDAM	07.00	16.00	B	1
		AIDABELLA	10.00	****	C	1
		SILVER MOON	08.00	23.00	I	1
		FREEWINDS	06.00	****	E	1
THU	12	MARELLA DISCOVERY	08.00	20.00	I	1
		AIDABELLA - Dept.	****	18.00	C	-
FRI	13	EVIRIMA	07.00	19.00	B	1
		CARNIVAL VENEZIA	09.00	22.00	C	1
SUN	15	OCEANIA NAUTICA	11.00	21.00	C	1
		EURODAM	08.00	17.00	B	1
		FREEWINDS - DEPT.	****	22.15	E	-

Helpful tips for your stay on Aruba

(Oranjestad)—When traveling to another country, especially for the first time, it is always better to be over-prepared than under-prepared. That is why we have a list of basic but important information that we think may come in handy to Aruba's visitors.

Electrical power

Aruba generally operates on 110V to 127V supply voltage and 60Hz. There are also three types of outlets used on the island: type A with two flat prongs; type B with two flat and one grounding prong, and on occasion, type F with two round prong and two earth clips on the side. However, Type A is most commonly found in homes and establishments.

Drinking water

The water that flows through the sinks of every house, hotels and other establishments is distilled and perfectly safe to drink. Aruba's drinking water exceeds WHO's international

standards for water quality, so there is no need to buy bottled water from the store.



Supermarket hours

Supermarket hours may vary depending on where you are staying on the island. Generally though, most supermarkets are open from 8am to 9 or 10pm, Monday through Saturday. On Sundays, supermarkets generally close earlier; mostly around 2pm.

Safety

Since February 2024, Aruba has been categorized as the safest country in the Caribbean by The Telegraph, and many tourist

that visit have often told us how they feel safe to explore the island or walk around at night. However, rare incidents do occur, so keep yourself and your belongings safe.



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WK 51 Ocean view \$65,000
WK 52 Ocean View \$65,000
WK 7 and 14 - all views

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2 Bed Ocean view \$13,500
2 Bed Garden view \$12,000
3 Bed Ocean view \$30,000

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del Pueblo: Tel.582 1253
San Nicolas:
Seroe Preto:Tel.584 4833

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Blood Bank Aruba 587 0002
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Police Tipline	11141
Ambulancia	911
Fire Dept.	115
Red Cross	582 2219

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Prof. Taxi	588 0035
Taxi D.T.S.	587 2300
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American Airlines	582 2700
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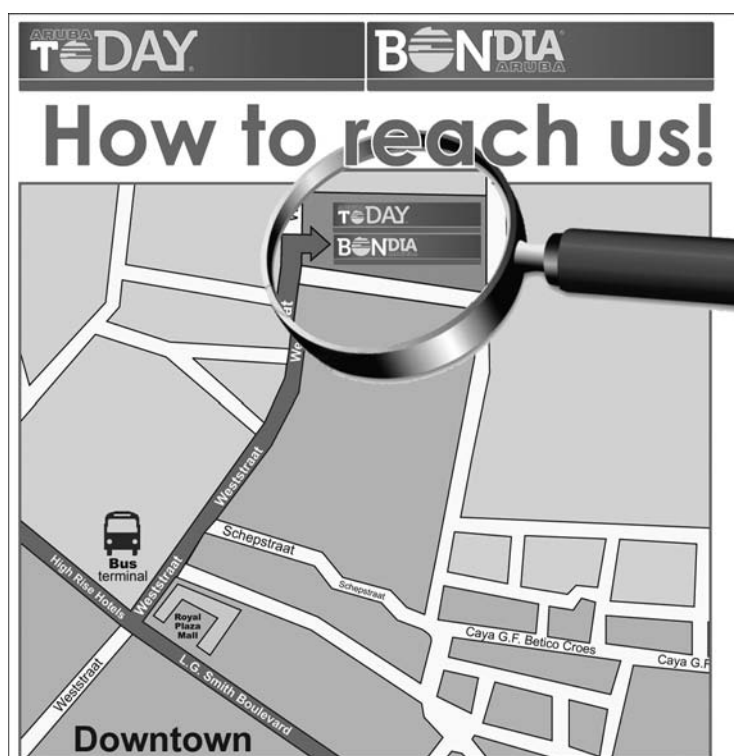
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ARUBA TODAY NEWS



How to bridge a retirement shortfall

Christine Benz of Morningstar

If you want to get yourself thoroughly depressed, spend a little time looking at statistics about Americans' retirement preparedness.

In Vanguard's most recent How America Saves report, the average participant balance in Vanguard plans was \$134,000 in 2023, but the median balance was just \$35,000. For workers with Vanguard plans who were between ages 55 and 64, the average and median balances were \$245,000 and \$88,000, respectively, in 2023. Roughly half of people between age 55 and 66 have no retirement savings at all, according to U.S. Census Bureau data, and women are in worse shape than men from the standpoint of retirement preparedness.

Clearly, many people are hurtling toward a shortfall, or living through one. And for people who are dramatically undersaved and largely reliant on Social Security for in-retirement living expenses, there's no getting around the fact that their standard of living in retirement is going to be lower than it was when they were working.

Rather than looking to a single blockbuster solution to help make up for a savings gap, what if you were to consider a little bit of several prudent strategies being willing to cut your standard of living a bit in retirement, working a bit longer, and investing a bit better, for example?

Employing more modest changes around the margins of your plan means they're apt to be more palatable from a lifestyle perspective, too; the thought of working until age 70 might not appeal but holding out until age 67 may be more doable.

Work longer

As pre-retirees have no doubt heard, working even a few years past traditional retirement age can deliver a threefer on the financial front, allowing additional savings and tax-deferred compounding, fewer years of portfolio drawdown, and perhaps delayed Social Security filing. Being willing to work part-time in retirement is another variation on this idea. Yet, as attractive as working longer looks by the numbers, it's a poor idea to make it the sole fallback plan, as many who plan to work longer are not able to.

Delay Social Security

This is another exceptionally powerful lever, allowing individuals to pick up an increase in benefits for every year they delay Social Security filing beyond their full retirement ages up until age 70. In order to pull this off, however, an individual may need to work longer or draw from a portfolio earlier.

Save more before retirement

The good news is that from a household budgetary standpoint, many individuals are best equipped to crank up their savings rates later in their careers. They're often in their peak earnings years, and other big-ticket preretirement expenses, such as home purchases and college funding, may be in the rearview mirror. The bad news is that with a shorter time horizon, those newly invested dollars will have less time to compound before they'll need to withdraw them. That doesn't mean that late-start retirees shouldn't bother with additional contributions: Even an additional \$5,000 invested per year, earning a modest average return of 4% for 10 years, would translate into more than an additional \$60,000 in retirement.



A canning jar filled with money sits on a shelf in East Derry, N.H., June 15, 2018.

Associated Press

Lower investment costs

This one's a gimme. Lower mutual fund expenses are correlated with better returns, so why wouldn't you work to bring your portfolio's total costs down? Lowering costs can be particularly advantageous as you enlarge your portfolio's stake in safer investments like bonds, where absolute investment returns, while better today than just a few years ago, are apt to be relatively low. Moreover, the differential between very strong- and very poor-performing investments can boil down to expenses.

Employ a flexible approach to portfolio withdrawals Retirees seeking the same dollar amount, adjusted for inflation, year after year in retirement will generally want to be more conservative with their starting amount for portfolio withdrawals. Meanwhile, those who are willing to employ a dynamic withdrawal approach, varying withdrawals based on how their portfolios have performed, can generally take a higher starting withdrawal percentage, as illustrated in our team's annual retirement-spending research. □

Small businesses plan events, start marketing earlier to deal with shorter holiday shopping season

By MAE ANDERSON
AP Business Writer

The holiday shopping season is underway, and this year small businesses have less time to capitalize on the busy shopping period. Only 27 days separate Thanksgiving and Christmas five fewer than last year. But there are still ways to make the most of a shorter season.

The National Retail Federation predicts that retail sales will rise between 2.5% and 3.5% compared with same period a year ago. Online shopping is expected to grow too. Adobe Digital Insights, a division of software company Adobe, predicts an 8.4% increase online for

the full season.

But small businesses have to work extra hard to compete against bigger retailers. One key strategy is to

promote deals to customers wherever you can, from social media to physical ads. Also, cultivate repeat customers by offering spe-

cial deals to loyalty program members.

Roberta Perry, owner of ScrubzBody Skin Care Products shop in Farmingdale, N.Y., said she started offering a "Buy One, Get One Free" promotion a week early the Friday before the Black Friday holiday shopping weekend. The holidays are key for her because she makes 30% of her sales in the six week holiday period. Offering the discount early "has given us the opportunity to hype our own special sales day, and take away some of the pressure from people who start their season the following week," she said. "It also gives us a

week before the true holiday season begins to send out the orders and get set for the next few weeks."

On Black Friday and Small Business Saturday, she offered a free gift with purchase and then for the rest of the holiday season is offering free gift wrapping and cards.

She also extends her hours in December.

"Anything to make our customers lives easier," she said. Amy Peterson, co-founder of Rebel Nell, a jewelry shop in Detroit, dealt with the shorter season by starting promotions early and creating a "Design Your Own Jewelry" event to draw in customers. □



People wait in line for hot donuts at Bryant Park's Winter Village, Tuesday, Nov. 26, 2024, New York.

Associated Press

Analysis: The Cavs, Magic and Rockets are off to surprise starts. Maybe that shouldn't be surprising

By **TIM REYNOLDS**
AP Basketball Writer

There was a conversation Cleveland guard Donovan Mitchell had during training camp, the topic being all the teams that were generating the most preseason buzz in the Eastern Conference. Boston was coming off an NBA championship. New York got Karl-Anthony Towns. Philadelphia added Paul George.

The Cavs? Not a big topic in early October. And Mitchell fully understood why.

"What have we done?" Mitchell asked. "They don't talk about us. That's fine. We'll just hold ourselves to our standard."

That approach seems to be working.

For the first time in 36 seasons yes, even before the LeBron James eras in Cleveland the Cavaliers are atop the NBA at the 25-game mark. They're 21-4, having come back to earth a bit following a 15-0 start but still better than anyone in the league at this point.

"We've kept our standards pretty high," Cavaliers coach Kenny Atkinson said. "And we keep it going."

The Cavs are just one of the surprise stories that



Cleveland Cavaliers head coach Kenny Atkinson gestures in the second half of an NBA basketball game against the Boston Celtics, Sunday, Dec. 1, 2024, in Cleveland.

Associated Press

have emerged as the season nears the one-third-done mark. Orlando the only team still unbeaten at home is off to its best start in 16 years at 17-9 and having done most of that without All-Star forward Paolo Banchero. And Houston is 16-8, behind only the Cavs, Boston, Oklahoma City and Memphis so far in the race for the league's best record.

Cleveland was a playoff team a year ago, as was Orlando. And the Rockets planted seeds for improvement last year as well; an 11-game winning streak late in the season fueled a push where they finished 41-41 in a major step forward after a few years of rebuilding.

"We kind of set that foundation last year to compete with everybody,"

Rockets coach Ime Udoka said. "Obviously, we had some ups and downs with winning and losing streaks at times, but to finish the season the way we did, getting to .500, 11-game winning streak and some close losses against high-level playoff teams, I think we kind of proved that to ourselves last year that that's who we're going to be."

A sign of the respect the Rockets are getting: Oddsmakers at BetMGM Scorebook have made them a favorite in 17 of 24 games so far this season, after favoring them only 30 times in 82 games last season.

"Based on coaches, players, GMs, people that we all know what they're saying, it seems like everybody else is taking notice as well," Udoka said.

They're taking notice of Orlando as well. The Magic lost their best player and haven't skipped a beat.

Banchero's injury after five games figured to doom Orlando for a while, and the Magic went 0-4 immediately after he tore his oblique. Entering Tuesday, they're 14-3 since and now have to regroup yet again. Franz Wagner stepped into the best-player-on-team role when Banchero got hurt, and now Wagner is going to miss several weeks with the exact same injury. Ask Magic coach Jamahl Mosley how the team has persevered, and he'll quickly credit everyone but himself. Around the league, it's Mosley getting a ton of the credit and rightly so for what Orlando is doing. □

Tiger Woods will return at the PNC Championship with son Charlie

By **DOUG FERGUSON**
AP Golf Writer

Tiger Woods is returning to the PNC Championship with 15-year-old son Charlie, his first competition since the British Open in July and after having a sixth surgery on his back three months ago.

Woods has played the 36-hole PNC Championship with Charlie every year since 2020. The tournament invites players who have won majors or The Players Championship with family members, typically their children.

"Playing together is something we look forward to and it's always more special when you're surrounded by friends and family," Woods said.

The PNC Championship is

Dec. 21-22 at the Ritz-Carlton Golf Club in Orlando, Florida, for 20 teams. New to the tournament this year are Fred Couples and stepson Hunter Hannemann, and Trevor Immelman and son Jacob.

Because the tournament is sanctioned by the PGA Tour Champions, Woods will be able to ride in a cart, key to him playing.

He chose to sit out last week at the Hero World Challenge in the Bahamas, where he is the tournament host, because he said his game was not sharp enough to compete against a field of the top 40 players in the world.

Woods set a Masters record in April by making his 24th consecutive cut, but he missed the cut in the other

three majors. He had a microdiscectomy in September to alleviate pain down his legs, his sixth surgery on his lower back.

The biggest one was fusion surgery in 2017, and he followed that by winning the Tour Championship a year later and capturing his 15th major with a fifth Masters title in 2019. His last victory was the Zozo Championship in Japan in the fall of 2019, tying Sam Snead for the PGA Tour's record of 82 career titles.

But there is no indication how often he can play in 2025.

"Whether my commitment going forward is once a month, yeah, I could say that all over again," Woods said last week. "But I truly don't know. I'm just trying

to rehab and still get stronger and better and feel better, really give myself the best chance I can going into next year."

The PNC Championship features 13-year-old Will

McGee, the son of Annika Sorenstam, and 89-year-old Gary Player. Nelly Korda returns to play with her father, former tennis Grand Slam champion Petr Korda. □



Charlie Woods, left, watches his father Tiger Woods, right, watches during the final round of the PNC Championship golf tournament, Dec. 18, 2022, in Orlando, Fla.

Associated Press



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Soto's record \$765 million, 15-year contract with Mets reverberates through MLB

By **RONALD BLUM** and **STEPHEN HAWKINS**

AP Baseball Writers

DALLAS (AP) — Shortly after striking a record \$765 million, 15-year contract for Juan Soto with the New York Mets, agent Scott Boras walked into Nick & Sam's, a restaurant near the winter meetings hotel, with about a dozen of his staff.

They were given a bottle of celebratory champagne and dined on deviled eggs, crab, shrimp and a New York strip steak — appropriate given that the Mets had stripped the All-Star outfielder from the rival Yankees.

"Scott is coming with his army of personnel. It was kind of like the 'Gladiator,'" said Boston Red Sox manager Alex Cora, who watched from across the steakhouse Sunday night. Soto's deal, the largest and longest in baseball history, was pending a physical. The agreement reverberated across the winter meetings and stung the Yankees, who on Sunday morning had raised their offer to \$760 million over 16 years from \$712.5 million for 15 years.

"My first thought is that my oldest kid is going to be 28 when he's done playing. That really puts it in perspective for me," San Francisco president of baseball operations Buster Posey said.

Yankees manager Aaron Boone learned of Soto's decision when his flight arrived in Dallas.

"Literally that the wheels hit the runway and the alert hit my phone that he had signed with the Mets," Boone recalled.

He texted an emoji of a face to Mets manager



New York Yankees' Juan Soto talks with agent Scott Boras before Game 1 of the baseball World Series against the Los Angeles Dodgers, Friday, Oct. 25, 2024, in Los Angeles.

Associated Press

Carlos Mendoza, a former Yankees coach. Mendoza wasn't sure what Boone meant.

"I sent him another face," Mendoza said Monday, shrugging his shoulders.

Soto's deal, which includes a \$75 million signing bonus, would rise to \$805 million if the Mets exercise their right to void Soto's ability to opt out after the 2029 season.

"I was shocked when I saw the bonus. My goodness," said Cincinnati manager Terry Francona, thinking about the implications for prices other teams will have to pay for players. "I think it makes it harder, but I certainly don't begrudge teams for doing it if they can. They're not breaking the rules. We're going to have to make really good decisions, and we're not going to be able to out-spend on mistakes, so we have to limit those."

Soto's deal sparked even greater expectations in

a free agent market that includes pitchers Corbin Burnes and Max Fried, first basemen Pete Alonso and Christian Walker, third baseman Alex Bregman and outfielder Anthony Santander.

"I think everybody's intent is hopefully to land their planes as soon as possible, whether it's trades or free agency," Yankees general manager Brian Cashman said.

Some teams have feared the economic might of Mets billionaire owner Steve Cohen, whose team has been baseball's biggest spender during the last two years.

"We want to win and we have an owner that is willing to do whatever it takes," Mendoza said.

Mets president of baseball operations David Stearns wouldn't discuss Soto because the deal wasn't finalized.

"Every year I've ever been

around the game at some point in the offseason there is a cry of inflationary free agency," he said. "And then at some point in the offseason there's this worry that a bunch of players aren't going to either get paid what they deserve or aren't going to have jobs." Many small-market teams have long sought a salary cap but the consensus since the 1994-95 strike has been not to propose a hard limit, knowing it would provoke another lengthy work stoppage. The current labor contract expires in December 2026.

Most teams were priced out of the Soto market.

"We have to be creative. We have to put the best 26 guys on a roster or the best 40 guys on a roster, not the best one or two," Kansas City manager Matt Quatraro said. "I still think at the end of the day you have a chance to compete against those guys. Soto

is going to hit four to five times a night. Those are impactful at-bats, but there's other ways to combat that with a full 26-man roster."

Soto, 26, helped Washington win the 2019 World Series and in 2022 turned down a \$440 million, 15-year offer from the Nationals, who then traded him to San Diego.

"I can sit here and say that I'm the only manager that won a World Series with him," Nationals manager Dave Martinez said. "How about that?"

San Diego traded Soto to the Yankees last December.

"I'm not sure there's anything we could do any different," Cashman said.

"Outside of winning the World Series, it played out perfect."

Combining with Aaron Judge, Soto helped the Yankees win their first AL pennant since 2009 before they lost to the Los Angeles Dodgers in the World Series. Boras asked Saturday night for final offers in the morning.

"Hal Steinbrenner really stepped up to find a way to retain Juan Soto," Cashman said. "He is one of one. He is a unique guy with a unique age."

Boras called Cashman on Sunday night to inform him Soto was signing elsewhere. Cashman then contacted Steinbrenner and team president Randy Levine to deliver the news to both jointly.

Cashman said the Yankees had a Zoom meeting with pitcher Blake Snell before he agreed to a \$182 million, five-year deal with the Dodgers. The GM remains interested in Boras' other clients, which include Burnes and Bregman. □